

United move would keep Crays Hill travellers out of Pitsea

Football club bid may block gipsy site plan

TRAVELLERS' hopes of moving from Crays Hill to Pitsea could be scuppered – by plans to build a new Basildon United stadium on land slated for a camp-site.

The travellers have had their eyes on land in Terminus Drive, Pitsea, as a place to relocate from the illegal camp at Dale Farm, Crays Hill.

Now the landowner, Government regeneration agency English Partnerships, is considering an alternative use – as a home for Basildon United Football Club.

The agency needs to relo-

■ By JON AUSTIN
Political reporter

cate six local sporting clubs so it can build a huge business park and housing estate off Gardiners Lane South, where United is currently based.

Now Basildon Council leader Malcolm Buckley, has confirmed Terminus Drive is being considered for a new football ground.

John Moran, the club's chairman, said: "We have not yet been approached, but we will consider any offer."

Mr Buckley says he believes the site is unfit for human habitation. But trav-

ellers insist they still want to pursue a possible move to Terminus Drive – between the A13 and the Fenchurch Street railway line.

Grattan Puxon, secretary of Dale Farm Housing Association, has written to English Partnerships, saying: "We are preparing to make a planning application for a gipsy caravan park at Terminus Drive and would appreciate your advice."

An agency spokesman said: "The site has been previously identified for employment use.

"It has also been identified as having potential for the relocation for one of the sports clubs."

Dale Farm Housing Association is within its rights to submit a planning application for the site – with or without the co-operation of the landowner.

The application would then be considered under normal planning procedures.

Travellers say they would prefer to stay together at Dale Farm, but are willing to disperse to smaller sites such as Terminus Drive and a legal site now being prepared at Colchester.

Referring to one of the extended traveller families at Crays Hill, Mr Puxon added: "The Sheridans like it big, but as a compromise,

rather than see their homes destroyed, some Dale Farm residents would be willing to move."

Tory MP John Baron, who represents both Crays Hill and Pitsea, organised a 5,000-name protest petition when Terminus Park was first mooted as a traveller site.

He has now written to the Government, urging it to reject any traveller site plan.

He said: "The Government must use all its influence to ensure the residents of Pitsea are not discriminated against.

"The 5,000-signature petition cannot and must not be ignored."

Have your say about pool art proposal

A PUBLIC meeting will be held tomorrow night in an effort to gauge support for bold plans to turn Basildon's Gloucester Park swimming pool into an art gallery.

The idea has been proposed by the Foundation of Essex Arts, which wants to see the pool turned into a gallery.

Vin Harrop, foundation chairman, said the pool building would be the perfect place to house a contemporary art gallery, county library, museum, and studios and workshops for artists.

The building, he added, itself even had "post-modern" artistic charm.

Mr Harrop said: "If the

40,000 people who visited the art exhibition in the Eastgate Centre are anything to go by, Basildon will have no difficulty in finding visitors.

"With an adjacent library, museums and studios with public access, the whole complex could be buzzing from early morning to late evening,

making a valid contribution to community life in the town."

Mr Harrop said he hoped the meeting would give residents' a chance to comment on the group's suggestions.

The meeting starts in the Towngate Theatre, Basildon, at 7pm.

Mr Harrop said the

group had also started a petition on the Prime Minister's website to gather support for its proposal.

So far, 51 people have signed the petition, which will remain open for a year.

To sign the online petition, visit:

petitions.pm.gov.uk/BASILDONGALLERY

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